

Lots to see, do in local area

By Linda Laws
Community relations advisor

When thinking about going out and about in this country, London is always a popular destination. But what do you know of the area around the base? If you are newly arrived in country, one of the first things which will strike you is just how rural the area is – there are no large factories or major industries here. It is principally a farming area for arable crops, and the black soil of the Fens, adjacent to Breckland, is ideal for growing celery.

Breckland

RAF Lakenheath is located in an area called Breckland which is characterised by its sandy and shallow topsoil – hence the rather peculiar shaped Scots Pine trees which only this kind of soil can sustain.

When you think of the nuisance that the rabbit population causes, it is hard to believe that they were actually introduced into this country by the Normans. At first they were used to provide food for their owner and his family, but were later used as a means to make money from the fur and meat. Rabbit-farming was of great importance to the local economy in the 14th century and a reminder of those times is still evident in some of the names in the area – such as Thetford Warren, Black Rabbit Warren and Coney Weston (coney is another name for a rabbit).

Towns, villages around the base

Lakenheath

The close proximity of this large village to the base is how RAF Lakenheath gets its name. Lakenheath is home to many Americans from the base, and is a popular location in which to seek housing because it is so close. Probably one of the finest buildings in Lakenheath is its church, dedicated to St. Mary. The story of English architecture from the Norman



Photo by Capt. Patrick Ryder

The Lakenheath church and its tower.

Conquest is revealed in different aspects – the font is possibly the best Early English font in the country. The hammer-beam roof is spanned by angels with unfolded wings, and the benches in the nave, the main body of the church, date from the 15th century. The parish priest is the Rev. Fr. James Mather and he will be happy to take parties (for a small fee) around this magnificent building. He can be contacted on (01842) 860683.

Two circular walks around the village were opened up last year. Walk A is 2.2 miles long and Walk B 4.9 miles. Maps are available in my office.

Brandon

The town of Brandon lies on the border between the counties of Suffolk and Norfolk. The layout is typical of many English towns and villages, where the High Street is the main thoroughfare. The shops are typical of those you will find in any small town (supermarket, greengrocer, bakery) and opening hours are between 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday to Saturday. Brandon has a small market on Thursday and Saturday mornings.

Just to the north of the town is Thetford Forest Park which offers recreational facilities for all the family. High Lodge Forest Centre within the park is open between Easter and September. It is possible to cycle, walk and orienteer and take advantage of guided events.

Mildenhall

Mildenhall is the largest town in the vicinity and is also home to Forest Heath District Council, our seat of local government. Their offices are located in College Heath Road. The town is set around the 16th century market cross and church. The original church was built in the 12th and 13th centuries, but was rebuilt in the 15th century. The town museum houses a replica of the Mildenhall Treasure, the original of which is held in the British Museum. The treasure was allegedly discovered by a farmer when ploughing his land in 1942.

Again, the shops in the town are only small retailers. There are several restaurants offering a variety of cuisines, and the Riverside Hotel is a Best Western. Market day is Friday.

Flintknapping

Flintknapping is the name given to a process by which hard flint is prepared. Flint in this area was mined at Grimes Graves, a historic monument located a few miles north of Brandon and looked after by English Heritage. The flint was prepared for use as a cladding for local houses and for use in firearms. In 1804, the British Army drew up a contract with the workers of Brandon for 356,000 flints a month to use in their flintlocks in the war against Napoleon.



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